

West Central Advisory Committee Meeting

April 26, 2016 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services- Room 2045

Members: Rosanne Kath; Adrienne Haugen; Cindy Bjur
Guests: David Rosenthal, Director-Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services; Deb
Staff: Diane Leonard; Christina Costello; Rich Diedrichsen
Interpreter(s): Anne Janckila
Note taker: Kris Hulett

Meeting called to order by Rich Diedrichsen. This meeting was called to answer any questions that members may have regarding how things will work once Rich retires. Rich shared that he would be retiring next Tuesday. Kris brought some hand-outs. Rich felt the most important one was the text to 9-1-1 handout. There is also a handout on different apps for phones and tablets that can be utilized by deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind consumers. Also information on Rich's retirement party in June. David Rosenthal, our Director came up from St. Paul to provide a division update and answer any questions you may have, so please ask away.

Division Update: About one year ago, the Minnesota Commission on Deaf and Hard of Hearing pushed through two studies:

1. Division-which looked at the structure of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, staffing in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, etc.
2. TAM Fund-which looks at the Telephone program and grant funding.

A steering committee was formed to approve funds for the studies. The studies have been in progress since this fall.

TAM/TED Study: There have been a lot of surveys and some outreach (client appointments, e-mails to current clients, set up groups, went to independent living centers, ARC Minnesota, DBS, Stroke Center, MCDHH posted, ABE groups that work with immigrants). 296 surveys were completed online, in person and over the phone. May 30th is the tentative deadline for the report that will be developed. Most of the participants were age 46-54, with the second highest number of participants coming from the 65 and retired age group. In order to participate, a participant must be deaf/hard of hearing, deafblind, have a physical impairment, or have a speech impairment.

DHHS Study: This study has six phases:

1. DHHS organization
2. DHHS Staffing-this will be ongoing. Staff filled out a survey every day for the month of February.
3. Gathering input from consumers-there will be five town hall meetings across the state.
4. Funding analysis
5. Service delivery analysis of Deafblind Consumer Directed Services
6. Final Report-Due June 30th.

As far as Rich's retirement goes, we are waiting until after the final report to post for his position. Mankato and Duluth offices may take some counties in the central region during this transition time. Mankato would take some southwest counties and Duluth would take some northeast counties. The study will also help to guide us in the knowing how to plan for replacing Rich.

Questions/Concerns:

Question/Concern: A concern raised was not being able to reach someone to get services, and also the paperwork for the Deafblind Consumer Directed Services (DBCDS) that should be done before July 1.

Response: DBCDS is funded by grants. Those funds are not affected by the survey or the study. David will bring region specific concerns back with him and address them. Diane let the consumer know that their case had already been given to her, so she will take over for Rich for that consumer.

Concern: Staff burnout from working short-handed for a couple of months.

Response: David explained that the current situation was temporary, but there is always a concern of staff being overloaded. That is why both Mankato and Duluth are available to provide back up in areas bordering their regions.

Question: Current projection until a new specialist is hired? 6 months? 1 year?

Response: Everything depends on the recommendations from the study. We can't say specifically until we know the recommendations.

Concern: It seems the southwest region has been ignored for many years and we want to make sure there are no problems with yet another change. There is a huge deaf population in Marshall but nothing that is ever scheduled around there. Willmar is about an hour and a half away and Winona is about three hours away. And Marshall is long drive for anyone, especially in the dark.

Response: Services have been cut due to budget cuts. Rich actually has a dual role and we are hoping the study will allow us to hire more than one person so they aren't having dual roles. David will also connect with the southwest office as well. As far as the meetings in the mentioned areas, they will also be broadcast as well. Diane offered to add this person to her listserv so they can receive the same information via e-mail.

Concern: Schools cutting the funding for school audiologists.

Discussion: Willmar is looking at possibly losing their audiologist. As a parent of young children, there is huge amount of dependence on school audiologists.

Question: What exactly is the purpose of a school audiologist?

Response: They mainly test hearing, make sure hearing aids are working correctly, guide parents through the entire process to get the correct hearing aids. There is also no charge to parents to have an audiologist see the children at school. Lions are doing some vision testing. Schools have not taken them up on the vision testing, but some daycares have offered the option to parents and the parents have really liked it. The Lions test checks for six things including astigmatism, near-sightedness, etc.

Concern: Interpreters are a big concern. They can go to school and graduate, work in a school for two years, but if they can't get certified, then they're stuck. They can maybe get a one year extension, but if they are not certified, they are out of work after that extension. Students depend on the interpreters for communication.

Response: For interpreting, the requirements used to be 4.0 but have now been lowered to 3.5. This ultimately means you will get an interpreter that can interpret "Ok". The interpreter exam used to be a written exam but they now have the written exam and have added a performance exam and that's where interpreters are struggling.

Just a side note: The text to 9-1-1 is expected to start in the fall of 2016. It will not work now and I believe you will get a message back asking you to please call in.

Our next meeting is scheduled for August 16 12:00-1:30 in room 2045 at the Kandiyohi Health & Human Services building.